**When Elli met Kokopelli…**

University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC)

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In the summer of 2005 I and 29 other colleagues from around the world met in the auditorium of the University of Illinois in Chicago to attend a seminar on American History. We were anticipating a long but interesting summer glancing into the American way of living, exploring the American dream, getting first hand information about the melting pot called America, getting acquainted with the told and untold stories of migration and forced migration, learning about the past of this nation. On that particular morning I was seated next to a Turkish Cypriot colleague called Berna and trying to concentrate on what the lecturer was saying when I noticed a funny-looking man walking towards me and taking the vacant seat on my left.

*‘Hi, my name is Ellie…’* I said looking for distraction, *‘I come from Cyprus..I am a Greek Cypriot..’*

***‘Hi*,’** he said whispering. ‘***My name is Kokopelli… I am a Hopi…’***

I was surprised to hear that he knew about Cyprus but, also, embarrassed to ask him where he was from and who the Hopi were.

* *Don’t listen to Prof. Hales*, he whistled. *He thinks he knows Chicago… It’s not Chicago… It’s Chicagoo… an Indian name for this land. Come with me… Let me show you around…*
* *No, I can’t. I have to stay and listen*…
* *Don’t listen. Feel. Touch. Explore. But remember. Don’t take any pictures of “us”. No pictures at all… This is a sin. I will watch your steps…*

On saying these he furiously left the class without saying ‘Goodbye’. ‘*Don’t say I didn’t warn you..*’ were his last words which stuck in my head and kept me from buying a camera. From that day on and all through the 14 days excursion we had, the figure of County. Twice I thought I saw him near the Loop downtown Chicago and then in a restored ex Oklahoma Indian reservation camp. He was also in the desert in an old cowboy film where whites were shooting down Indians and in Albuquerque - always like a shadow, always a fleeting image vanishing before being able to show him to Berna who, by now, must have thought I was either lazy or weird for refusing to take any pictures.

Finally, our excursion took us to Acoma Pueblo. I could hear our professor at the front of the bus giving out the last instruction before getting off, ‘I remind you that *pictures are not allowed. The people living here don’t like to get their images printed… they believe you steal their soul… Don’t take pictures of any living or dead… Don’t take pictures. Just listen to them, feel and touch. Acoma Pueblo people are very strict on this issue. Please don’t insult them*.’

And then, as a turned the corner I got into temptation. Kokopelli, with his flute on his side, was taking a nap… looking peaceful and tired after all this trip. It was the first time he was in full view and not just a fleeting image or a sensation and it was the first time for the duration of my stay in the U.S. that I disobeyed. Fearful that this strange acquaintance will vanish once again, I snatched Berna’s camera and got a picture of him… without using a flash.

I still have this picture which travels me back to a journey that has awaken my senses. The burning colours, the colourful music, the aroma from traditional dishes, the harshness of the dry land.. Kokopelli, the little one from the humble and peaceful tribe of Hopi is still staring back at me from my desk top asking me questions like, *‘Will mankind ever find balance and show respect to nature? – for in nature’s eyes we are all equal’.*